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ABSTRACT

A Vygotskian review of children's language examines language samples of a 7-year-old boy at home, at a birthday party, and at play in a sandbox. The language samples indicate common patterns, including his use of tools and symbol together in play. A common thread in the samples is his involvement with high tech tools of futuristic toys. Vygotsky believed the use of tools and signs shared important properties (they both involve mediating activity). He claimed a child's speech was as important as action in attaining goals, and the more complex the action demanded by the situation, the greater the importance of speech in the total operation. Vygotsky emphasized the historically shaped, culturally transmitted psychology of humans. He considered play the primary means of children's cultural development, noting that every function in the child's cultural development appeared on a social, then later, psychological level. Observation of children at a day care center, showed that the child's play involved futuristic adventures that evolved from television, the toy market, and Halloween. It was observed that boys and girls used similar language related to special occasions, but that girls focused on the domestic scene, and boys focused on the external environment. Girls' language emphasized appearances and relationships, and boys' language emphasized territory, defense, movement, power, and control. Girls monitored boys' aggressive behavior, and boys monitored girls' capabilities. An appendix includes the language samples. (SM)

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"Kidwatching: A Vygotskyan Approach to Children's
Language in the 'Star Wars' Age."

By

Suzanne S. Monroe

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Part I. Tool and Symbol

In reviewing the language samples of my nephew Robin, age 7, there appear to be some common patterns. One of the most consistent is his use of tool and symbol together in his play. According to Vygotsky, the use of tools and signs share important properties in that they both involve mediating activity. And they are different, as signs are internally oriented (aimed at mastering the self), and tools are externally oriented (aimed at mastering and triumphing over nature).

"It seems both natural and necessary for children to speak while they act; in our research we have found that speech not only accompanies practical activity but also plays a specific role in carrying it out."

(Vygotsky, Mind in Society, p. 25)

Vygotsky believed that a child's speech was as important as his action in attaining the goal; and that the more complex the action demanded by the situation, the greater the importance of speech in the total operation. He concluded from his observations that children solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands.

With this as background, I have included three of Robin's language samples--all examples of combined use of tool and symbol. Two of the transcripts focus on solitary play and language, and one documents Robin's play within a group of boys. The common thread running through all of these samples is his involvement with the "high tech" tools of futuristic toys.

In the first two transcripts ("At Home" and "Birthday Party"), most of his language accompanies manipulation of three different "Dino-Bots" which he received as birthday gifts. In the third transcript, he builds a "dinosaur world" with his own tools: sticks, spoons and shovel; later, he introduces robots and space ships. His accompanying language is a combination of "primordial" and "futuristic".

In addition to his consistent use of tool and symbol together in his play, Robin also uses "inner speech" at a verbal level. It is as if he thinks out-loud. He speaks in single words or short phrases, and it seems to be a "world unto itself." The fact that I am observing nearby seems insignificant.

The two words repeated most often are "Dino-Bot" and "Dinosaur." It is as if each of these creates a whole magical setting known only to Robin. This observation is consistent with Vygotsky, who, in referring to inner speech, suggested that a single word is so saturated with sense that many words would be required to explain it in external speech.

"A word is a micro-cosm of human consciousness."

(Vygotsky, Thought & Language, p.153)

Although not substantiated by transcripts, Robin's daily vocabulary and language patterns are very futuristic, apparently evolved from the dramas of "Star Wars" and "Masters of the Universe." As an initiate into this collective consciousness, I have stepped into a foreign country--certainly, a foreign language. Dinosaurs.....transformers....Dino-Bots....Votran.... Luke Skywalker....Darth Vader....and the list goes on! All three of these observations of Robin provide continuous language samples in which a single word imparts the "meaning" of a whole universe of experience.

The first language sample "At Home" provides the uninitiated with a general orientation to Dino-Bots and the language accompanying the use of this tool. The last paragraph is a wonderful example of "inner speech" in its verbalized form. Robin appears to "think out loud." There is no particular grammatical form--only individual words and thoughts...some in the form of dialogue. It is as if he is describing each image as it comes onto the "screen" of his mind.

The second language sample "Birthday Party" is included because it gives further background on Dino-Bots, and exemplifies the idea of a symbol as the micro-cosm of consciousness. "Dino-Bot" is used seven times in a conversation period of less than two (2) minutes. What

impresses me the most is the boys' repeated use of the word, and their apparent happiness in saying it so often. In this sample, there is also an example of the "zone of proximal development," in which a child's problem-solving abilities are enhanced in collaboration with more capable peers. Each of the boys is playing with a different Dino-Bot. They have a generalized idea of what it "means"; however, they are still developing a definition of "what it is" by describing "what it is not." They discuss whether Dino-Bots can fly or not; and which kinds "can" or "can't." They also decide how complex Dino-Bots could become, and still be understood.

During the past several years, Robin has developed an in-depth interest in dinosaurs...reading about them...drawing pictures....writing stories. He is very familiar with them as a species, describes them individually, and can spell and pronounce many of the more difficult names: brontosaurus....tyrannosaurus...and company! He admits, ..."I'm a dinosaur-studier...I study books about them and stuff."

In the third language sample, Robin speaks of volcanos and monsters, combined with references to robot cars and space ships. He talks of a "space ship"... "opening the hatch"... "volcanos exploding"...all in the same breath. Most of his imaginative language focuses on creating and destroying the "futuristic" dinosaur world--complete with large beasts, volcanos, space ships and robot cars. Throughout his play, he combines skillful use of tool and symbol. He manipulates spoons, sticks, rocks, adult-size shovels, wood blocks, plastic cars and dinosaurs in his creative efforts. According to Vygotsky:

"Children address the objects of their attention equally with words and sticks, demonstrating the fundamental and inseparable tie between speech and action in the child's activity."

(Vygotsky, Mind In Society, p.29)

The third language sample holds the most interest for me because Robin combined historical periods--the age of dinosaurs with the age of robots--periods so distant in time and relationship, so contradictory in their locus of power. Robin's fascination with the dinosaur

age appears to be with the power of the natural world of volcanos and dinosaurs--both being primitive forms, over-sized, dangerous and possibly "out of control." In contrast, his world of robots, robot cars and space ships is representative of our "high tech" futuristic age, where the power resides in the machines--built and controlled by humans.

Perhaps it is this use and control of the tool that provides security for Robin....and security for the mass consciousness. His play may indeed be a micro-cosm of the larger human condition. Does Robin receive images from his imagination, the mass media, or the "Dino-Bot" manufacturers? Do they influence his decision to combine these uniquely different ages? I suspect he may have drawn upon these sources...and many others...for his sandbox drama!

Part II. The Role of Play In Development.

Perhaps the most distinguishing theme of Vygotsky's writing is his emphasis on the historically shaped and culturally transmitted psychology of human beings. Within this larger theoretical framework, he considered play as the primary means of children's cultural development. He maintained that every function in the child's cultural development appeared twice--on two levels--first on the social, and later on the psychological. Vygotsky observed that children, in their play, project themselves into adult activities of their culture and rehearse their future roles and values.

"Toward the beginning of preschool age, when desires that cannot be immediately gratified or forgotten make their appearance and the tendency to immediate fulfillment of desires, characteristic of the preceding stage, is retained, the child's behavior changes. To resolve this tension, the preschool child enters an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized, and this world is what we call play."

* (Vygotsky, Mind In Society, p. 93)

Vygotsky's suggestions regarding play are reinforced by Vivian Paley in her 1984 publication of Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner:

"Social action in kindergarten is contained in dramatic plots...leadership often goes to the child who is most confident about the meaning of symbols."

"Every year, the girls begin with stories of good little families, while the boys bring us a litany of superheroes and bad guys...."

(Paley, p. 1)

She continues:

"....Every year, the boys search and find their means to the same end. The names of the heroes change, but the action is the same. The result is a widening gap between boys and girls...."

(Paley, p. 16)

"....language development and creative dramatics may be on my mind, but the children take over the story-plays for a more urgent matter: to inform one another of the preferred images for boys and girls..."

(Paley, p. 3)

Upon first reading Vivian Paley's generalizations regarding kindergartner's behavior, I was struck by her emphasis on sex bias in the children's play. It seemed like an out-dated observation, and rather out-of-place in our current "age of enlightenment" with expanded consciousness and sophistication regarding equity issues, gender expectations, and sex-role stereotypes. I reassured myself that we had come so far.....providing options for girls in "powerful" and "achieving" roles, and options for boys in "creative" and "nurturing" roles--a reverse in the traditional sex-role stereotypes.

At the same time I was reading Paley's assumptions about kindergartners, I was also involved in development of a unit on non-sexist materials and resources for teachers. In re-reading Barbara Sprung's materials published by Women's Action Alliance in the late '70's, I discovered several research summaries in which the issue of sex bias was addressed. I was most impressed with the study conducted by the late Dr. Marcia Guttentag, formerly of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The purpose of her research was to stimulate non-sexist thinking by boys and girls in three major areas: jobs and occupations, family roles and socio-emotional roles. Children of three different age groups participated in the study--kindergarten and grades five and nine. According to Guttentag:

"...Let me summarize what each group of children were like before the intervention and what happened to them after the intervention. Before intervention kindergarten boys and girls very strongly believed that males and females do different things and they very seldom have the same jobs. They saw men in strictly traditional male jobs.....women's roles were predominantly interpersonal in nature. There was little overlap between the occupational roles ascribed to the two sexes. The kindergartners could clearly describe personality stereotypes of girls, but they were less sure about the masculine stereotypes of boys."

Guttentag continues:

"...In the post-intervention we found that the kindergartners, both boys and girls, very significantly changed their attitudes about occupational possibilities for men and women.....While the intervention had a very great effect on expanding their beliefs about job and occupational possibilities, the children's stereotyping in the socio-emotional sphere was unchanged. However, what was very interesting is that they were totally unstereotyped in their ideas about what they themselves were like, and they became much less stereotyped than other children. They dropped whatever stereotypes they had about what all boys are like and what all girls are like, and they became much freer about socio-emotional possibilities for other children...."

(Guttentag from Barbara Sprung's
Perspectives on Non-Sexist Early
Childhood Education, p. 75)

Because I wanted to test Paley's assumptions as well as Guttentag's findings, I decided to focus my observations on the language and play of five-year-olds at St. Mark's Day Care Center. The preschooler's dramatic play became a daily revelation..reminiscent of many hours of "kidwatching" with my first group of five-year-olds in 1965. At that time the typical themes included the "family" with its traditional roles; and the "adventurers," who often started their play in the family setting, later to leave for the more distant and exciting lands of work, climbing, flying and fighting. The typical family group included mother, father, big sister and baby; typical adventurers were "Bat Man and Robin."

In the current dramatic play plots at St. Marks, I re-discover the "family," but find myself a stranger in the land of "adventurers." Bat Man and Robin have been replaced by a mixed cast: Dracula...Dino-Bots, transformers....He Man....She Ra....burglers....robbers...bad guys!. These futuristic "adventurers" have undoubtedly evolved from various sources: Halloween, television and the toy market, among others. Regardless of source, as each word is spoken, it becomes a locus of "meaning" for the dramatic players, creating a unique series of "images" which are shared and built up by the group. The "zone of proximal development" impacts on the world of dramatic play!

In the first vignette, Girl #1 is cast in the role of mother; as such, she approves or disapproves of other's chosen roles: "...no, you're only 14. You can babysit." She initiates much of the conversation and monitors others responses and behavior: "...We're going to the dance...let's bake our own cake...You guys are fighting...You go tell teacher they're fighting!" In general, the girl's play appears to focus on the homemaking area, clarifying relationships, planning birthdays and holiday celebrations, and monitoring the boys' aggressive behavior.

Although the boys frequently begin play in the homemaking area, they soon move into the block corner, where they immediately begin building and eventually define their purpose: "...to keep robbers out." Much of their conversation revolves around walls...robbers...burglars...weapons...werewolves...bikers...bad guys...go-bots...and transformers. Their own roles are symbolized by power and strength. There is always an element of control in the midst of fearful situations and scary "happenings."

There are two brief conversations which have sexist over-tones. The first is Girl #1's response: "...We don't like burglars, but some boys like burglars...but we don't". The second conversation is one between Girl #1 and Boy #1. She threatens to report the boys' fighting to the teacher, and at the same time uses ridicule...."Go-Bots are stupid, dumb, and dull." He responds...."Not as stupid as Barbie Dolls'." Although the focus is on robots and dolls, the subtle suggestion is that each of the opposite sex may be "stupid" for playing with their sex-stereotyped toys.

In the second vignette, three boys play in the block area...they are on the bus. It takes them some time to decide on purpose and assign roles. They try out lots of ideas on one another: living in the bus...death of parents...rock singers and dancers...bad guys...and birthdays. In closing, they decide to "pretend" to be bad guys--a role suggested and reinforced most often within the boys' group.

In the second vignette, there is an interesting balance of girls' play and language, which is oriented toward both toward building and creating as well as nurturing and relating. As they build and arrange the space within the sandbox, they visit about babies and family relationships. Girl #1 appears to be the most verbally aggressive as she suggests "climbing mountains," asks questions, and praises and compliments her own work. She is competitive: "...ours is going to be pretty...but theirs is not going to be pretty,...and..."yours sucks'." She is negative in response to Girl #3's question: "Are you still my friend?" She also criticizes her own mountain co-created with a friend; then she modifies the bold statement: "...it looks ugly"...with "...a little bit...here, I'll pat it." She attempts to balance her assertive nature with more nurturing qualities. In general, the girls' behavior in the sandbox is sedentary, with very little movement around the sandbox. Language appears to play a major role in assertive and aggressive behavior. The girls also use "pretty" frequently, often to balance competition: "...we're making a pretty mountain...theirs is bigger than our..(but) ours is going to be pretty."

In the fourth and final vignette, Girl #1 (Sara) plays with two boys. Early in the drama, she coordinates the housekeeping activities; later, as more power and authority are usurped by Boy #1, she becomes creatively adaptive. (This is the only observed and documented instance of overt sex-role stereotyping in this series of vignettes). Boy #1 indicates that only boys--not girls--can be Dracula...and he adds that he is proud to be a boy. Sara reflects on his obvious put-down, and then moves into the block area to become "She-Ra." As she physically climbs on blocks and verbally announces that she likes "She-Ra....because she can do anything," Sara has socially and psychologically owned her own power. In assuming the role of "She-Ra", Sara moves beyond her potential for victimization to a position of strength and strong identity, ...and saying it is believing it!

In analyzing the language samples of St. Mark's preschoolers I have noted the following patterns:

- (1) Both girls and boys use language related to special occasions, such as Birthdays and Halloween.

- (2) Both boys and girls use criticism and ridicule frequently as a means of monitoring each other's behavior.
- (3) The leaders in both girls and boys play groups appear to monitor the narrative plot as well as the roles and behaviors of various groups members through the use of language.
- (4) Girls tend to focus on the domestic scene, concentrating their language on family roles and relationships within the immediate environment.
- (5) Boys tend to focus on the external environment, creating a setting other than home. They build "pretend" walls and defend other protected spaces.
- (6) Girls' language focuses on appearances and relationships: ...pretty...ugly...mother...husband...father...sister...brother... baby-sitter....but, also includes strong images like "She-Ra".
- (7) Boys' language focuses on territory, defense, movement, power, and control: walls...buses...signs...monsters...robbers...bad guys! They often speak of weapons and guns.
- (8) Girls tend to monitor boys' aggressive behavior; whereas, boys tend to monitor girls' capabilities.

As a result of reading Vygotsky...Paley..Goodman...Sprung.... Guttentag...Pogrebin....., and my own "kidwatching", I am forced to entertain some new questions: Are preschoolers still segregating by gender in their dramatic play and role assignments? Is this development innate or socially/culturally programmed? Do children continue to dramatize sexist social expectations in spite of unbiased role models at home and/or school? Are preschoolers "reflecting" the current images of their families and neighborhoods, or images of the mass media? What is the impact of "language" through oral tradition, literature, and the media on the perpetuation of sexist roles and gender-related behaviors?

And finally, how does the larger social/cultural environment provide "mirrored messages" which are unbiased, are unconsciously internalized, and re-created through "new" language? Listen to the children....

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In conclusion, I would like to draw upon the thoughts of two facilitators of social change:

"....to understand another's speech, we must know it's motivation..."

(Vygotsky, Thought and Language, p. 151)

"In the arduous battle against sexism, we can keep in mind the kindergarten class in Pittsburgh whose members were asked what they each want to be when they grow up (Lever, 1977).

There was the predictable round of answers--the boys wanted to be astronauts, truck drivers, or firemen, and the girls dreamed of becoming ballerinas, librarians, or stewardesses. But then there was a twist to the query. The children were asked, 'what would you want to be if you were the opposite sex?'

One little boy said, 'Well, I guess if I was a girl, then I'd have to grow up and be nothing.'

And the first little girl who was asked what she'd be if she were a boy, answered with bright eyes, 'Ah, if I were a boy, I would grow wings and fly across the city.'

That little girl's answer symbolizes, for me, the goal of non-sexist parenting. And that little boy's response is a reminder of how far we have yet to go before American males cease to pity and patronize American females. While parents cannot rear their children in a cultural vacuum, we can give our daughters and sons that vision flight and freedom and the conviction that all things are possible. We can help them grow wings!"

(Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Editor of Ms. Magazine; from Barbara Sprung's Perspectives on Non-Sexist Early Childhood Education, p. 120-121).

Appendix:

Part I: Language Samples of Robin Fisher

"At Home"

"Birthday Party"

"Backyard Sandbox"

Part II: Language Samples--St. Mark's Day Care

Vignette #1

Vignette #2

Vignette #3

Vignette #4

Language Sample
(S. Monroe)

"At Home"

Robin Fisher, Age 7
November 1, 1985
Las Cruces, N.M.

On this particular week-end, I went to Las Cruces to visit my sister's family. Her son, Robin, was celebrating his 7th Birthday. My sample is presented in three parts: the first of Robin alone on Birthday Eve; the second is with his friends at his Birthday party in the park; and the third is Robin playing alone in the sandbox in his back yard.

Saturday (11/1/85): Robin has just opened one gift early, and is overjoyed because it's just what he wanted--a "Dino-Bot." Being relatively ignorant of these "futuristic" creatures, I asked many questions. He also volunteered information when he realized how little I knew.

A: What is it?

C: This is "Dino-Bot"...by Transformers. It's name is "Slag." Do you want to see him transform?

A: What is transforming?

C: It's like a truck or car--they aren't anymore....they transform into a robot. (He works to change the moveable parts)...there... finally..."Tri-ser-a-tops"...see...look it! Watch how it goes back...this goes down, this goes like that...here, put him here!

A: What is that one called?

C: Mash...Thunderhawk...His name is "Matt."

A: What does he do?

C: He drives the car, and fights for good! We're taking flying lessons...pow...flew...shut this...me shoot! Thunderhawk, then Matt (pulling on them)...me got pistol...no...legs don't feel good...you can't shoot me...I'm too clumsy...wait!

Transform...or I'll blow your head off! There's a gem...this guy can do all kinds of stuff...push a button...and it can do anything...swords and missile launches...they both have guns... they both have the same things. I just put the sword where his head goes...This guy has shields on his feet...this guy has 10 and the other one has 15.

Shoot at me...you missed the last one...zit...flew...Can I get two replacements for these missiles? If I can find them....

Language Sample
(S. Monroe)

"Birthday Party"
Age 7

Robin Fisher
11/2/85 1:00 p.m.
Las Cruces, N.M.

Robin is celebrating his 7th Birthday with three friends at the park. He has just finished opening his gifts, and all four boys are playing with "Dino-Bots" and "Transformers".

Jeb: Robin, get over here...

Robin: No, leave her alone...(referring to baby sister Katy, who is play on the fringes).

Ski: Come on, let's play!

Jeb: Hi there, Ski...

Ski: What are you doing...where did you come from?

Robin: Where's my Dino-Bot? Yes, I want him...

Ski: Here's your Dino-Bot that I'm using...

Robin: Dino-Bot...attach....mash...look out! Edge of cliff....
...compute...

Jeb: Aren't you going to play?

Ski: Can you fly?

Robin: Dino-Bots can fly...yours can't, Jeb--it doesn't have wings.
Ever hear of a triple Dino-Bot?

Jeb: There's no such thing!

Ski: Yes, but it could be....these things are already so complex.
If you made it change three times--nobody could understand it!

Robin: He had a little green thing with it...where do you want to go?

Ski: I'm flying...look out...Dino-Bot tries it again! But you can't fly...(to Jeb). I'm going down now--I'll land on the ground (slides down slide with Dino-Bot).

The drama ends as boys head for picnic table for pizza and peps.

Language Sample
(S. Monroe)

"Backyard Sandbox"

Robin Fisher, 7
11/2/85 5:00 p.m.
Las Cruces, N.M.

C: This is my volcano...and that's...I'm digging a tunnel...
that's what I should get...a kit (runs inside, and returns with
a black car).

A: What's that?

C: It's a robot car...but a man drive it...I might as well make a
volcano...I'll do it right in this spot...there! (Digging large
hole in sandpile). ...Maybe I'll make a dinosaur world...

A: How would you describe a dinosaur world?

C: It's where the dinosaurs live...and it has sea monsters
in it...I'll make a river right there...I'll have to make a
stream....We can have a mountain here...it's warm now...(sings
to himself, then hums)...da-da-ta-da-...

Where's that other spoon? Wow, a big dirt clod...it's too hard!
(...throws spoon away and uses shovel to build volcano; plants
dinosaurs and cars in the middle).

A: Is that an old volcano that you had built before?

C: (shaking his head affirmingly)...It's deep too...I've got a
better idea--get big shovelfuls...bomb's away!

I know a lot about them "cause I'm a "dinosaur studier"--I
study books about them and stuff.

A: How long have you been studying them?

C: About a year from now...I don't study as much now. They dig
in the ground--looking for eggs...This guy eats eggs...he's
an egg-stealer...It's soft sand to dig...Here's a spear...I've
got to bury this. I don't think I want a lake anymore...

Where are the chipmunks? (sings to himself)...My space ship...
my space ship...my space ship (using sing-song voice).

Open the hatch...open...blowing the volcanos, hills and holes
apart! I know how a volcano explodes. In the middle of the
volcano is hot lava...hotter and higher...and hotter and higher...
and it blows! Crater's coming...ah, worms!

Vignette #1
(S. Monroe)

Day Care Center
Five-year-olds
Teacher: Robin

St. Mark's
11/21/85
10:00 a.m.

Five children (3 boys and 2 girls) are involved in dramatic play in the homemaking and block areas--adjacent to one another.

Girl #1: We're going to the dance....

Boy #1: But I'm the dad....remember!

Girl #2: I want to go too....

Girl #1: No, you'e only 14...You can babysit....

Girl #2: I'm very sorry, I can't babysit because I'm going to marry my husband...no, I can't do it...

Girl #1: (Asking another girl wandering into the play area)
Will you please babysit?

Girl #3: No I'm going to the dance...don't ask me again.

After this opening scene, the boys depart for the adjacent block. The girls remain on the sheet with toy dishes and salt mixture.

Boy #1: What are these blocks for?

Boy #2: For protection from robbers.....

Boy #3: We locked it,...we locked it...with steel!

Boy #1: Nobody can break bricks either...

Boy #2: But what if they climb over?

Boy #1: They can't....because there's a pretend wall....

Boy #3: And burglars aren't very smart...they are kinda' dumb....

Girl #1: (Yelling from a distance)...Yeah,....stupid, dumb and dull....that's what I always say....

Girl #2: I always say it too....

Girl #1: We don't like burglars--but some boys like burglars--but we don't...

Girl #2: I'm going to call the police!

Girl #1: Let's bake our own cake, o.k.? (focusing on dishes again).

Girl #2: Yeah, we'll surprise the kids at the neighbor's house... Happy Thanksgiving....their birthday is on the 31st of July....

Boy #1 and at Halloween....I'll be a bad guy....

Boy #2: When you see me on Halloween...I'll look so weird... I'm going to be a werewolf!

Boy #1: I'm going to be a bad guy...

Boy #3: I'm going to be a biker with a big tatoo!

Boy #2: What kind of weapon do you got? Do you got every channel, Scott: (turning the dial of imaginary t.v. set)...I'm switching it...

Boy #1: Do you want to see Go-Bots on t.v.?

Boy #2: Yeah...Yeah!

Boy #1: Here they are! Wanna' see transformers? (Boys are starting to push, threaten with fists and get into three-way fight).

Boy #2: One time he broke my car....and now, I can break your t.v.!"

Girl #1: You guys are fighting.....

Boy #2: He can't keep having Go-Bot turns....(near tears)...

Boy #1: Transformers are like robots but they are bigger....

Girl #1: They are dumb, stupid and dull....transformers are dumb... stupid and dull.....you go tell teacher they are fighting! (motions to Girl #2)...Andrea's telling on you... on all of you!

Boy #1: I didn't do anything....

Girl #1: You were fighting....stupid Go-Bots...

Boy #1: They are not....not as stupid as Barbie Dolls...

Girl #1: Spy-Gor?

Boy #1: Yes....

Girl #1: There is no such thing as Spy-Gor...

Boy #1: All I watched today was Transformers and Go-Bots...

Boy #2: Sh....I'm trying to talk....

Boy #1: It takes two....it takes two....it takes two....

Boy #2: No, it takes one....

Boy #1: No, it takes two....it takes two to fight!

Boy #2: No, it takes one...

Boy #1: It takes.....two!

Boy #2: Uh-uh....

Teacher announces that it is time to pick up, and the drama ends.

Vignette #2
(S. Monroe)

Day Care Center
Five -year-olds
Teacher: Robin

St. Mark's
11/21/85
11:00 a.m.

The setting is outdoors. The sandbox is an extra-large size and comfortably accomodates two small groups of children. One grouping is composed of two girls and the other of two girls and one boy.

Group I

Girl #1: We could climb the mountains and go high into the sky...

Girl #2: Do you want a baby? I'm going to have one...I have two little brothers.

Girl #3: (Calling from Group #II)...I'm going to have two brothers!

Girl #1: Why don't you have them now?

Girl #3: Because my mom is still pregnant....

Girl #2: So, are we going to have little brothers?

Girl #1: You have a lot of babies...I have two brothers and no sisters...(turning to observer)...We're making a pretty mountain.....

Girl #2: We're going to put sticks and grass and cactus on it...

Girl #1: I'll pick leaves off the trees. Their's is bigger than ours...ours is going to be pretty, but their's is not going to be pretty....

Boy #1: (Calling from Group II)...Yes...it is....

Girl #1: Your's sucks! (...receiving no response from anyone).

Girl #3: Are you still my friend? (walking over to Group I).

Girl #1: No, I'm not because last time you didn't let me push your baby sister...no, I'm not your friend...(then, turning to Girl #2, she continues)...It looks ugly!

Girl #2: Our's doesn't look ugly!

Girl #1: Yes, it does...a little bit...Here, I'll pat it here... (she pats and shapes the growing mountain of sand).

The teacher calls the children to snack table, and they leave play area immediately.

Language Vignette #3
(S. Monroe)

Day Care Center
Five-year-olds
Teacher: Robin

St. Mark's
11/26/85
9:30 a.m.

Three boys play in the block area, manipulating a variety of shapes and colors of large building blocks.

Boy #1: We're making a bus...

All: Yeah! (in unison)

Boy #2: Let's make a sign....o.k., that's the sign...now put some more blocks...you give us the blocks so we can build...o.k.?

Boy #1: This is the sign for the bus...this is the bus station...here are all the seats for the kids!

Boy #2: There's only three people...

Boy #3 Can I drive this time?

Boy #1: No, you have to wait...I'll drive this time...

Boy #3: Come on kids...no, you're the kid...stand out there!

Girl: (Passing by) How many people are playing here?

Boy #1: Three.

Girl: You can't be playing with those brick blocks..... teacher said "no"...I'm telling...(she leaves room).

Boy #1: We're driving you home, kid....

Boy #2: O.K., I'll take this away from here (moving block for door).

Boy #3 He can live in here...make a bed for him...

Boy #2: We could put this together...oh no, we need a pillow!

Boy #1: Go get pillows! You could stay for a nap.

Boy #2: We could dance inside the bus (begins dancing and singing and re-arranging blocks.)

Boy #1: We have to go to school. And we'll drive you to school now. ..and you have to be in here forever, because your folks are dead...

Boy #2: Let's not pretend my mom and dad are dead.....

Boy #3: We'll pretend you're lost from your mom and dad...or that your mom and dad ran away. Then he runs to someone else.

Boy #2: Let's pretend we all live in the bus...and all our parents ran away. I'm the boy....

Boy #1: I'm the driver....

Boy #3: Somebody knocked the sign down...not me....not me... not me.....

Boy #2 Not me either!

A three-year-old runs by the group, and yells tauntingly "underpants"--is ignored by the group, or so it seems!

Boy #1: We have to stay up and do a Rocky Road show (dancing).

Boy #2: You're getting on the pillows!

Boy #1: You be the guitar, and I'll be the singer (starts rocking and swinging).

Boy #2: Oh, no...we knocked over the sign!

Boy #1: Then we have to fix the sign...it's hard to lift.

Boy #2: Now, we have to go to bed. What if "underpants" comes...he'll wake us up...and then i'll push him in the face.

Boy #3: And I'll pull his hair (They close the door, and all three start dancing and singing inside the bus--hard rock style).

Boy #1: Here come the bad guys....we turn into bad guys!

Boy #2: When we sing the song...we turn into bad guys!

Boy #1: Pretend someone stepped on our faces ...(starts whining).

Boy #3: You shouldn't have fallen down...a stranger did that...

Boy #1: I like you still, Scott! I like you still, Scott!
I like you still, Scott! That was just an accident...
You didn't really hurt me...

Boy #3: I'll invite you to my birthday party--it's going to be January 13...

Boy #2: Mine's January 15!

Boy #1; Mine's January 16!

Boy #3: Oh, who cares..it's a long way away...January 13 is mine...

Boy #2 January 13 is mine too!

Boy #3: We have the same birthday...mine's after Christmas.

Boy #2: You can't keep changing...you're lying...Mine is not January 13...it's January 3.

Boy #3: Let's pretend...

Boy #1: I'm going to be a bad guy...

Boy #3: Me, too. Come on, let's pretend to be bad guys...

Teacher gives the warning to clean up. The boys knock all the blocks down using karate-type kicks...jumping around and stretching arms out, while making karate sounds. One throws the last block into the air...then they begin stacking the blocks against the wall. They finish and go to circle time.

Vignette #4
(S. Monroe)

Day Care Center
Five-year-olds
Teacher: Robin

St. Mark's
12/2/85
10:00 a.m.

A small group of children start to play on the sheet with dishes and salt. Girl #1 appears to be coordinating the drama and suggesting play ideas to Boys #1 and #2.

Girl #1: Let's make something to eat and drink.....

Boy #1: Yeah, a potion.....

Boy #2: Something that's poison!

Boy #1: Let's put blood in it!

Girl #1: Hold it still! (as she pours salt through a narrow opening in the bottle).

Boy #1: I could be Dracula--and drink the blood....I could be Dracula.....

Boy # 2: Me, too...

Girl #1: Me, too.....

Boy #1: Not girls, only boys can be....I'm so glad I'm a boy, and can be Dracula! (He stands up, places his hands on his chest and goes to the block area).

Girl #1 and Boy #2 remain on the sheet for awhile, continuing with pouring and mixing. She appears to be reflective, and is silent for some time, then she leaves the sheet, goes to the block area and climbs on a large stack of blocks.

Girl #1: I'm She-Ra....(throwing her arms high into the air).

Boy #1: I hate She-Ra....(keeping his back to her and scowling as he picks up a block)

Boy #2 now moves into the block area watching She-Ra, but is silent.

Girl #1: I like She-Ra....she is strong and brave....she can do anything!

A teacher comes into the block area and asks the children to start putting the toys away. The drama is finished! Later, the teacher shares with me that Girl #1 is Sara, well-known for her strength and independence. Often she plays within the boys' group or on the fringes...."She holds her own." I would agree, and very creatively!